

Markoff, oldest man in America, dies at 110

Loving caretaker was with him to the end

By **Steve Lopez**
Los Angeles Times

The oldest male in the United States was a man of many appetites, even at 110, and his live-in caretaker did her best to feed them.

Rosario Reyes would make banana pancakes for Morrie Markoff, and he would plead for more syrup. She'd bring him a corned beef sandwich, followed by a piece of lemon meringue pie, and reluctantly give in when he insisted on washing that down with a cup of hot chocolate.

Markoff wanted to read the paper, watch the news and get in some exercise every day, and Reyes helped make it happen. He made clear that on his 111th birthday in January, he fully expected an exotic dancer to perform in the living room of his Bunker Hill apartment, for the third straight year. Reyes already had the balloons in storage.

In their normal daily routine, they'd listen to classical music together or watch, yet again, two of Markoff's favorite movies: "Midway" or "Guns of Navarone." Markoff also liked "The Notebook," which Reyes hadn't seen. He bet her that if they watched it together, she would cry. And she did.

He called her by her nickname, Charito. She called him Mr. Morrie.

"It was kind of a remarkable relationship," said Judith Hansen, Markoff's daughter, who called Reyes an angel and one of countless unsung heroes in the elder-care ranks. "Dad would not have lived as long as he did without Charito. She's an incredibly wise woman, and she knew what would keep him going. She knew that he was a man who wanted to accomplish something each day."

And he usually did, until his body began giving out in April. Markoff was briefly hospitalized a few weeks ago and died at home June 3, with Charito holding Mr. Morrie's hands in hers.

"He died in peace," she said.

'Curiosity about everything'

Markoff grew up in a New York City tenement, dropped out of school after eighth grade, went to a trade school, married his beloved Betty in 1938 and moved west, where he sometimes drove her crazy with his manic energy and argumentative nature. As he aged and mellowed, Markoff swooned over his beloved "Betsy," as he called her, and after she died in 2019, he couldn't stop singing a song he wrote about pining to be with her again.

He once said that he couldn't recall being bored a day in his life, and that was his gift to all of us: the reminder that if you stay plugged into the world around you and open yourself to new experiences, the aging process can slow to a crawl.

"If I had to put my finger on one thing that helped his longevity, I would say it was his innate curiosity



Morrie Markoff and his wife, Betty, at home in September 2013. Morrie died June 3 at 110.



Rosario Reyes was the caregiver to Morrie Markoff, who died this month at 110.

about everything," said his son, Steven, who, like his sister, is in his 80s.

That and, of course, the luck of good genes.

"You could bring him a sow bug," Steven said, "and he would say, 'Look, it rolled into a little ball. How did it do that?' Or he would say, 'I just met the most interesting person in the world on a bus.'"

In fact, Morrie and Betty loved exploring Los Angeles by bus, and one day they met Tracy Huston, the owner of a Chinatown gallery. Markoff, who was trained as a machinist but held a variety of jobs, mentioned that while servicing and repairing gadgets and appliances, he'd noticed

that a toilet tank float looked like the skirt of a ballerina. So he began welding scrap metal parts together, fashioning dozens of sculptures, including a ballerina.

Huston was intrigued, and in 2014, Markoff held his first-ever art exhibit in her gallery. It was yet another high point in a life that had just hit the century mark.

Secret to a long life

Markoff frequently talked about his years-in-the-making memoir, and the working title was his answer to a question he fielded often: "What is the secret to a long life?" Markoff was 103 when he sold copies of "Keep

Breathing" from his very own booth at the L.A. Times Festival of Books.

Markoff's live-in care was a luxury many people won't be able to afford, given longer lifespans. He'd saved and invested well, Steven said, but the cost of 24-hour care can easily run \$10,000-\$15,000 monthly.

"The real lesson learned from this is how unprepared our government is to deal with end of life for people," Steven said. "It seems to me a tragedy, with all the money that's spent in other ways."

When Markoff was nearing the end, Judith got the idea that with so many millions of people experiencing dementia in old age, her father's extraordinary brain might be useful to researchers. She went to the National Institutes of Health website and was linked to Tish Hevel of the nonprofit Brain Donor Project, who gladly accepted the donation.

"Lots of studies are being done on super-agers, and he may be the super-est of super-agers," Hevel told me. "Some people in brain banking think this could be the oldest cognitively intact brain that is now preserved."

Hevel said 16,000 brains are in the bank, helping researchers study mental illness, Parkinson's disease, cognitive loss and other neurological disorders. Having a healthy brain like Markoff's can be invaluable, Hevel said, for comparative analysis.

"I think Dad would be tickled to death to know that someone was interested enough to analyze his brain," said Steven, who had lunch with his father weekly and was struck by how sharp he remained until several weeks ago, when he began to fade and the family decided to begin hospice care.

28 trapped on ride upside down saved

The Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Emergency crews in Oregon rescued 28 people Friday after they were stuck for about half an hour dangling upside down high on a ride at a century-old amusement park.

Portland Fire and Rescue said on the social platform X that firefighters worked with engineers at Oaks Park to manually lower the ride, but crews had been preparing to conduct a high-angle ropes rescue if necessary. All riders were being evacuated and medically evaluated, and there were no reports of injuries.

One rider with a pre-existing medical condition was taken to a hospital for further evaluation as a precaution, Oaks Amusement Park said in a statement posted on social media. Medics released all other passengers.

The ride, called AtmosFEAR, operates like a pendulum, with the capacity to swing riders completely upside down.

Chris Ryan and his wife, from nearby Gresham, were at the park for his birthday. He told The Associated Press in a Facebook message that they had just been planning to ride AtmosFEAR when they saw it was stuck and heard people saying, "Oh my God, they are upside down."

They decided to walk away because of "how scary the situation was," he said. They eventually got on the Ferris wheel and heard a loudspeaker announcement that



In this photo provided by Oregon Amusement Ride-Rescue, first responders arrive at Oaks Park for a ride that is stuck with multiple riders Friday in Portland, Ore.

the park was closed and that people should evacuate.

When the ride stopped, park staff immediately called 911 and emergency responders arrived about 25 minutes later, the park statement said. Park maintenance workers were able to return the ride to its unloading position minutes after first responders arrived.

Portland Fire said about 30 people were on board. The amusement park statement said there were 28 riders.

The ride has been in operation since 2021 and has not had any

prior incidents, the park said. It will remain closed until further notice. The park said it would work with the ride's manufacturer and state inspectors to determine the cause of the stoppage.

"We wish to express our deepest appreciation to the first responders and our staff for taking prompt action, leading to a positive outcome today, and to the rest of the park guests who swiftly followed directions to vacate the park to make way for the emergency responders to attend to the situation," it said.

Wildfire to burn for weeks before containment

By **Lauren Penington**
The Denver Post

DENVER — The campfire-sparked Interlaken wildfire continues to grow in Lake County, reaching a total burn area of 591 acres with minimal containment, fire officials said Saturday.

Flames — which have been burning on U.S. Forest Service land for five days — will continue to creep outward for more than a week, according to forest service reports. Currently the fire is only 15 percent contained, and fire officials don't expect the blaze to reach full containment until June 23.

And containment isn't the end of the wildfire's burn.

Wildfire containment isn't the same as a fire being put out — it's the status of a control line being completed around the fire to stop the fire's spread. Wildfires can burn for days or longer after containment is reached.

While the fire's growth is small compared with other Colorado wildfires, like the nearly 5,700 acre Spruce Creek fire started by a lightning strike in May, it's not a small area overall.

Overnight Thursday, the fire grew 6 acres. In total, the fire is burning on about 448 football fields of land.

The fire was started by an abandoned campfire about 180 feet from the Interlaken trail and 1.5 miles from the trailhead, fire officials said.